

Opinion. Opinion is intended to promote communication between lepidopterists resulting from the content of speculative papers. Comments, viewpoints and suggestions on any issues of lepidopterology may be included. Contributions should be as concise as possible and may include data. Reference should be limited to work basic to the topic.

Rebuttal to Murphy and Ehrlich on Common Names of Butterflies

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Further to Bobs, Tits, etc., I appreciate the opportunity to respond to Murphy and Ehrlich (1983). When I initiated the Joint Common Names Committee it was with certain knowledge that it would be a thankless task. Thus the present response is made in the spirit of patient indulgence of obvious and inevitable arguments. I am at least thankful that Murphy and Ehrlich put them forth with a degree of wit and thoughtfulness that renders them worth reading if not heeding.

It is unfortunate that I was sent their article to rebut rather than to review. Had I seen it in time, the manuscript might have been rid of a number of rather egregious errors. These should be dealt with first. Murphy and Ehrlich claim that "Lack of communication is exemplified by some of the recently minted 'common names'. . . the 'Mimic,' the 'Elf', the 'Pixie', the 'Laure', and the 'Goldspot Aguna' (Pyle, 1981). Batting poorly, they attribute all these names to my coinage—while all but the last go back to Holland or before. Mather (1983) did a little better (.500) in choosing names said to be of my own invention to criticize—Sunrise Skipper and the Brigadier were indeed mine, though the Gray Marble and Pale Blue antedated my field guide. (At least none of these critics went as far as Shapiro (1975), who labeled my "Bat Blue" (Pyle, 1974) one of the two worst common names ever, second only to Austin Clark's "Goggle Eye".) Likewise, Larger Lantana Butterfly (to get back to Murphy and Ehrlich's dislikes) has precedence with Zimmerman (1958), to distinguish it from the Smaller Lantana Butterfly—both imported to Hawaii to battle the weedy Lantana. These authors should line up their ducks better.

Second, Murphy and Ehrlich state that "the Lepidopterists' Society has recently formed a committee to standardize and presumably stabilize common names...." The facts are these. After writing the *Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Butterflies*, for which I was required by the editors to furnish common names for all species included, I realized

acutely the confusion reigning on this front. Furthermore, correspondence (J. Scott, in litt.) confirmed my suspicion that more and more new common names were on the way in forthcoming books. Therefore I attempted to keep brand new names to a minimum in the field guide, while nonetheless employing rubrics that said more about the organism than simply reiterating the latinized name (e.g., Rockslide vs. *Damoetus* Checkerspot). In order to bring some order and oversight to this arena, I decided we could do worse than emulate the ornithologists, as we did with the Xerces Society Fourth of July Butterfly Counts (the birders have been through all these things well before us). The American Ornithologists' Union maintains a committee on common names, charged with overseeing changes and standardization of vernacular names for American birds. This committee is accorded almost as much authority as the ICZN has with respect to scientific names.

Therefore, in the summer of 1980, I put first to the Board of Directors of the Xerces Society, then to the Executive Council of the Lepidopterists' Society, a proposal that a joint committee be established. Its remit was to research previously published and proposed English names for North American butterflies, to poll feelings on the matter of preference, and to recommend a list of standard names. Both boards, on which I sat, approved the proposal and, as perpetrator, I was named chairman. Some twenty interested and knowledgeable individuals from both societies have been named to the committee. It has been hoped annually to present the proposed list to the boards for their approval, but the task has not yet been completed.

Now to consider Murphy and Ehrlich's actual arguments briefly. Their first concerns the lack of universality among common names, and the fact that few are really in common use. This is true, and perhaps the term "vernacular name" should be used in preference to the misleading "common name". One goal of the standard list is to increase the general awareness of the preferred names, and their usage.

Second, Murphy and Ehrlich claim that common names do not communicate well, nor do they express relationships. The Nearctic/Palaearctic discordance exacerbates this problem. This point is also well taken and well argued in the paper. The ornithologists have had to deal with this, changing the falcon hitherto known as the "Sparrow Hawk" to American Kestrel, since the Sparrow Hawk in Britain is an accipiter, not a falcon; whereas the British refuse to reciprocate by calling their rather pretentious "The Wren" by its North American nomen, Winter Wren.

However, common names do communicate better than binomials to certain people, as I will show below in replying to another of the authors' points. And it is ironic that some common names, such as swallowtail, should remain static and retain far more communicability than the plethora of generic names currently on the books for papilionids. Then too,

everyone is familiar with the story of how the Monarch has borne *n* scientific names, but has been a Monarch throughout by any other name.

Murphy and Ehrlich interrupt their diatribe to discourse on idiotic names. This is clearly a case of the ear of the beholder. Quite true that chauvinism abounds, and that many common names are misleading. The authors forgot to mention the so-called Lupine Blue, one of the few western plebejines with no lupine association whatever—yet the problem here originates with the scientific name, *Plebejus lupini*! One goal of the Committee is to select appropriate names where available. In any case, one person's idiocy is another's charm or chuckle: the authors must bridle at the colorful common names of English moths (Lesser Lutestring, True Lovers' Knot, Heart and Dart) yet many find them a source of pleasure, and even lepidopterists use them extensively in Great Britain. And as John Hinchliff aptly put it in a letter to me, remarking upon the article in question: "I don't think any serious lepidopterist would expect that a common name would have any scientific value, but we can all use a little romance in our lives." Apparently, Mssrs. Murphy and Ehrlich have no such need.

Finally, Murphy and Ehrlich argue that common names "often have been concocted, mainly at publishers' requests, on the assumption that laypersons cannot learn latinized names." This they find insulting to the public mentality. In this statement they score a hit and a miss. Yes, publishers do request—nay, demand—that common names be supplied for each organism covered in a field guide. There is no way around that for the author, I can aver. However, since field guides will inevitably have common names, is it not better they be standard, so that *Colias nastes* comes out Labrador Sulphur in all texts, instead of that in one, Pale Arctic Clouded Yellow in another, and Nasty Green Sulphur in a third? Such is the case at present. Nor is it an option to suppose that such books will ever rely on latinized names exclusively, for they will not, for reasons Murphy and Ehrlich fail to comprehend. They err subtly but substantially when they suggest that the public is thought not to be *able* to learn Latin names. The unavoidable (and very different) fact is that many nature enthusiasts simply *do not want* to use Latin names, they prefer the vernacular; and that many others are intimidated by scientific names. I have tried to dispell this in all my butterfly books, but it will remain true that Latin scares off some people who might otherwise enjoy the resource, given an easy handle to hang on to. Obviously, any halfway intelligent person *can* learn the binomials. But the insult lies in insisting they should have to do so if they do not wish to.

In their rigorous scientific milieu, which has yielded rich rewards of knowledge, the authors apparently have forgotten how young and uninitiated persons first come into nature's gravitational field. It is not through *Glaucopsyche* and *Shijimiaeoides*. As an author of popular butterfly books

and an experienced teacher of butterfly field classes to children and biologically naive adults, I am certain that English names are a necessary bridge of acquaintance for many persons. Recognizing this, the Ohio Lepidopterists have begun including common as well as scientific names in their newsletter (Eric Metzler, in litt.). It is not important that *Speyeria mormonia* is no more difficult to learn or remember than Mormon Fritillary. What matters is that one is English and one is not. Latin is a roadblock to many a timid mind. It needn't remain that way: those who go on to amateur study quickly begin to learn the Latin, and I always encourage my students to do so as soon as they are comfortable with the idea. But believe me, many intelligent and caring persons would never come to butterflies at all if they did not have common names as cushions to recognition.

And we need those people to care about butterflies. For natural, scarce resources to be protected, they need to have a constituency that cares. This means that many more people than the specialists need to be aware of resources such as butterflies. It is ironic that Murphy and Ehrlich and I should all come down to conservation as the final rationale for our views. They believe we lose time better directed toward saving taxa by worrying about common names, and that to do so is preposterous. I believe that common names serve the conservation of taxa, by making butterflies accessible to people who can make a difference—many, many more people than the serious amateurs and specialists willing to spend time to learn their proper names. Witness the success of the Mission Blue and El Segundo Blue in gathering public support in California, something that *Plebejus (Icaricia) icarioides missionensis* and *Euphilotes battoides allyni* could never do. There would never be room in the headlines, not to mention the value of the romantic appeal lent by the English names.

Murphy and Ehrlich's commitment to conservation is not to be questioned, and I for one know the junior author to be a magnificent teacher of the young—I was one who benefitted from it. However, to insist that common names should be suppressed, that their supposed usefulness is phoney, and that those interested in butterflies should have to learn the Latin, is both doctrinaire and naive. Doctrinaire because it denies a matter of choice that is clearly exercised by the buyers and users of popular guides. Naive, because it ignores the fact that every other branch of natural history is deeply dependent upon vernaculars to appeal to beginners. When wildflowers, trees, mushrooms, mammals, birds, even herps and minerals all have common names (if far from standard in most cases), should we hold out for butterflies, mediocally and stubbornly? I say we should embrace them for their limited but appropriate and necessary purposes; and be in the vanguard, right behind ornithology as usual, in standardizing them. The "problem" of common names will not go away, so let us trod on it squarely and turn it from a stumbling block into a stepping

stone.

Murphy and Ehrlich's humor vanishes and they drop from doctrinaire to despotism in their final insistence. Their criticism of Miller and Brown for telling us all what scientific names to use is well known (Ehrlich and Murphy, 1982). So when they insist that "lepidopterists should use latinized names—exclusively!", it seems to me they practice a double standard. If I want to call *Vanessa atalanta* a Red Admiral, I certainly shall; and I suspect most of us would reserve the right to revert to the mother tongue now and again for favorites.

Indeed, in putting forth a list of "standard" common names, it is not the Committee's intention to force anyone to use them. People will call butterflies what they damn well please. The hope for such a list is simply that it will furnish a basis for consistency and help to turn away confusion. At the very least, a valuable historical document should come of it. We should be thankful that our task does not approach that of the ornithologists: the Ruddy Duck alone has owned several dozen colloquial names. Few American butterflies have gathered more than two or three. Further contributions of obscure common names are warmly solicited.

Murphy and Ehrlich call upon the committee to disband itself. They may hope on, but it isn't likely at this point. I would like to thank them for their witty, if too self-serious, vehicle of debate. From this discussion will surely flow a sharper vision of what to call a butterfly in any language. Meanwhile, I have chosen not to reveal some of these authors' own favorite field epithets for elusive checkerspots; suffice it to say that they wildly ignore their own injunction that lepidopterists should use latinized names exclusively!

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